

Birdie Real Bird

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Medium: glass and leather

About the Artist:

Birdie Real Bird, from Garryowen, is a member of the Crow tribe, a member of the Big Lodge Clan, and a child of the Whistling Water Clan. She was raised on the reservation in a traditional family. Known throughout Montana for her exquisite beading projects and dolls, she comes from a long line of beading artists and learned to bead watching those elders work on projects.

As Real Bird grew up, she began beading more complex projects under the tutelage of her grandmother. When she was growing up, she and her grandmother sold beadwork medallions to the wives of the employees at the Bureau of Indian Affairs or the Indian Health Services in order to get gas money. In college, Birdie made and sold beaded necklaces and earrings.

About the Art:

She always uses correct Crow traditional designs and colors in her work, but when she travels she looks for examples of Plains Indian beadwork in museum collections, such as the Peabody. Her dolls are in numerous collections, including the Smithsonian Museum.

Real Bird is a retired middle school teacher and now devotes most of her time to beading and teaching traditional Crow culture. She is a popular speaker at reservation schools where she shares information about traditional dress, tells stories, teaches language, native games and beading. She works with students to explain the significance of cradleboards and dolls to Crow culture, helping students to also make the connections between the Crow, Yellowstone Park and their own community. Real Bird also travels the state working with with the Montana Historical Museum, OPI, and the Montana Arts Council. Recently she volunteered to paint murals on a building in Lodge Grass in hopes of improving the city's look. She has demonstrated beading at the National Folk Festival in Butte, the Yellowstone Art Museum, and the Montana Historical Museum.

Photography by Bently Spang